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ABSTRACT

This issue is excerpted from The American Faculty Poll sponsored by the Teachers Investment Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF) and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago in 1999. In this survey, 1,511 full-time faculty members from 285 institutions were interviewed. About one-quarter of these respondents listed the humanities as their academic discipline, and almost a third were in science or engineering. Approximately one-fourth of the faculty interviewed were in 2-year institutions, and 48% were at 4-year public institutions. Overall, 54% taught only undergraduates. Of these respondents, 62% had tenure and 19% were in tenure-track appointments. Faculty members overwhelmingly listed teaching as their principal activity, and men were somewhat more likely than women to show research, administration, or a combination of responsibilities as their primary activity. More than one-third indicated that their institution had a faculty union, and about two-thirds of respondents from these institutions belonged to the union. Faculty members rated the opportunity to teach students very highly, giving a picture of faculty members who are overwhelmingly content with both the professional and personal benefits to holding an academic appointment. Discontent centered around levels of institutional support for scholarship, teaching load, or compensation and student. The issue related to the future of higher education that garnered the most comment from faculty members was the lack of preparation on the part of students entering college today. Faculty members also expressed concerns about educational finance, finding qualified teachers, and the "commodification" of higher education. (SLD)

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Update

The American Faculty Poll

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Update

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The American Faculty Poll

INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Update* is an excerpt from The American Faculty Poll, sponsored by TIAA-CREF. The survey covers faculty members' attitudes about their career choices and professional life, their level of satisfaction with various aspects of the work environment, their opinions about institutional policies and priorities, and their views about the present state of higher education and prospects for its future. To read the entire report go to www.tiaa-cref.org.

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago was responsible for the data collection, processing, and analyses. NORC conducted telephone interviews in the spring of 1999 with a nationally representative sample of full-time college and university faculty members whose duties included undergraduate teaching. A total of 1,511 full-time faculty members from the 285 selected institutions were interviewed. The overall response rate was 66 percent.

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Among respondents, there are twice as many males as females. Of those whose race/ethnicity is known, 86 percent are white, with each minority group constituting less than 5 percent of the sample (see Table 1). Two-thirds are between ages 40-59. About a third are full professors.

About one-fourth (24 percent) of faculty members list the humanities as their academic discipline. Another 14 percent are in the social sciences. Almost a third (32 percent) are in the sciences or engineering. The remaining fields are education (5 percent), business (6 percent), health/medicine (8 percent), and other (9 percent), which includes areas such as communications and theology/religion.

Institution Type and Size

Approximately one-fourth of the faculty members are in two-year institutions, another 28 percent are in four-year private colleges and universities, with 48 percent in four-year public institutions.

Teaching Loads and Levels of Instruction

Overall, 54 percent of the 1,511 responding faculty members teach only undergraduate students; 46 percent teach both undergraduates

Table 1

Full-Time Faculty Member Demographic Data

	Percentage
Age	
<40	17.1
40-49	30.3
50-59	34.3
60+	16.7
Gender	
Male	65.2
Female	34.8
Race/Ethnicity	
White	85.6
Non-White	12.4
African American	3.8
Asian/Asian American	4.6
Hispanic	2.8
Other	1.2
Academic Rank	
Lecturer/Instructor/Other	16.8
Assistant Professor	22.2
Associate Professor	26.1
Professor	34.9
Citizenship	
U.S.	92.6
Non-U.S.	7.3
Academic Discipline	
Humanities	24.1
Social Sciences	14.2
Science/Engineering	32.4
Education	5.1
Business	6.5
Health/Medicine	8.5
Other	9.1

NOTE: Because of missing data, including occasional refusals, not all categories will sum to 100 percent.

SOURCE: *1999 American Faculty Poll*, NORC and TIAA-CREF.

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Table 2

Distribution of Faculty Work Load: Principal Activity

	PERCENTAGE			
	Teaching	Research	Administration	Other
Total	78.6	84.8	5.3	7.7
Gender				
Male	75.3	10.7	5.8	8.2
Female	84.7	4.0	4.5	6.8
Academic Rank				
Lecturer/Instructor/Other	91.3	1.3	5.1	2.3
Assistant Professor	76.2	11.4	1.8	10.6
Associate Professor	76.3	9.5	6.2	8.0
Professor	75.5	9.0	7.1	8.4
Institution Type				
Two-year Institution	92.2	0.0	4.5	3.3
Four-year Private Institution	80.6	8.2	6.5	4.7
Four-year Public Institution	70.8	12.5	5.1	11.6

SOURCE: *1999 American Faculty Poll*, NORC and TIAA-CREFF

and graduate/ professional students.

With regard to tenure status, faculty members in the poll fall into one of four categories. Most (62 percent) have tenure or are on tenure-track appointments (19 percent). Another 10 percent are at colleges and universities that have formal tenure systems but do not hold tenure-eligible appointments, and the remaining 9 percent teach at institutions that do not have a tenure system.

Faculty members overwhelmingly list teaching as their principal activity in their current position (79 percent); the remaining faculty indicate their main responsibility is research, administration, or a combination of responsibilities (see Table 2). A higher percentage of female faculty members (85 percent) list teaching as their principal activity than do their male counterparts (75 percent), which is likely to be a function of the gender distribution by type of institution.

Faculty Unions

Over a third of the faculty members (38 percent) note that their institution has a faculty union; in those cases, about two-thirds (64 percent) belong to it. There are large differences by type of institution. About 60 percent of faculty members at two-year institutions report having a faculty union at their institution. In the four-year public institutions, 43 percent indicate the presence of a union. On the other hand, only about one in ten (12 percent) faculty members at four-year private colleges and universities indicate the presence of a union.

OVERALL CAREER CHOICES AND ATTITUDES

Levels of Satisfaction

In the aggregate, responding faculty members seem content with their career choices. Almost nine in ten faculty members (87 percent) indicate that, could they begin their professional career anew, they would

Table 3

Distribution of Faculty Who Would "Definitely" Pursue an Academic Career Again

	Percentage
Age	
<40	67.7
40-49	60.6
50-59	62.8
60+	63.2
Gender	
Male	65.0
Female	58.8
Race/Ethnicity	
White	62.1
Non-White	71.5
Institution Type	
Two-Year Institution	68.5
Four-Year Private Institution	61.3
Four-Year Public Institution	61.0
Academic Discipline	
Humanities	24.1
Social Seciences	14.2
Science/Engineering	32.4
Education	5.1
Business	6.5
Health/Medicine	8.5
Other	9.1
Tenure Status	
Tenured	60.8
On tenure track	68.9
Neither	59.8
No tenure system at institution	67.4

SOURCE: *1999 American Faculty Poll*, NORC and TIAA-CREFF

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definitely (63 percent) or probably (24 percent) pursue an academic career. Only 5 percent say that they would probably not want to be in academe; the remaining 7 percent are not sure.

The percentage reporting that they would definitely pursue the same career again (63 percent) fluctuates, but within fairly narrow bounds, across age, gender, race/ethnicity, academic rank, and institution type. Faculty members 40 years of age and older, females, whites, those in the humanities and those employed in four-year institutions report the lowest "definitely yes" totals, though the proportions are all at least 55 percent (see Table 3).

Over 90 percent of faculty members indicate that they are either very satisfied (40 percent) or satisfied (52 percent) with their current position; only 1 percent are not at all satisfied (see Table 4). The "very satisfied" percentage increases with age (36 percent for those under 50 to 45 percent for 60 years of age and older).

Career Alternatives

About 4 in 10 respondents report that they had considered a career change. For those who had considered a career change, the average — both mean and median -– time frame reported is around age 39, with virtually all of these contemplations taking place between ages 30 and 50. As to when such decisions took place with respect to time spent in higher education, about two-thirds of them said it occurred when they had been teaching between one and 10 years.

Table 4

Distribution of Satisfaction with Current Position

	DISTRIBUTION OF SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT POSITION			
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Not Very Satisfied	Not at All Satisfied
Total	39.9	51.9	6.9	1.3
Age				
<40	36.5	57.7	5.0	0.7
40-49	36.0	55.2	6.7	2.1
50-59	43.0	47.1	9.3	0.6
60+	45.5	48.1	4.7	1.7
Race/Ethnicity				
White	40.5	51.5	6.7	1.3
Non-White	36.2	53.9	8.7	1.2
Institution Type				
Two-year Institution	46.8	45.2	7.3	0.7
Four-year Private Institution	43.8	48.6	5.8	1.8
Four-year Public Institution	34.2	57.2	7.3	1.2
Institution Size				
<2,000	40.1	51.7	6.6	1.6
2,000-4,000	40.2	51.3	6.9	1.6
4,001-8,000	40.7	49.1	8.6	1.6
8,001-12,000	35.2	55.2	8.9	0.7
12,001-20,000	35.2	55.2	8.9	0.7
12,001-20,000	39.0	54.0	5.1	2.0
>20,000	43.3	50.8	5.9	–
Tenure Status				
Tenured	40.8	50.8	7.6	0.8
On tenure track	33.9	58.6	5.2	2.4
Neither	32.8	58.9	7.0	1.4
No tenure system at institution	53.9	38.1	5.9	2.1

SOURCE: *1999 American Faculty Poll*, NORC and TIAA-CREFF

Poll participants could have given multiple responses.

WORK AND CAREER: IMPORTANT FACTORS AND LEVELS OF SATISFACTION

Important Career Factors

The faculty members were asked to rate 17 work and career related factors in terms of how important these factors are to them personally. The four possible response categories are "very important," "important," "not very important," and "not at all important."

The "opportunity to educate" students is by far the most important consideration for faculty members — 86 percent consider it very important. "Teaching courses of interest" (77 percent) and "having time for family and personal

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needs" (76 percent) are the next most important factors.

Two highly personal considerations — money and job security — are also important for faculty members but lag behind other factors in terms of being "very important." However, they loom larger for faculty members at two-year institutions, where 65 percent and 71 percent, respectively, rate them as "very important." Combining the two positive response options of "very important" and "important," 14 of the 17 factors receive combined importance ratings of over 90 percent. "The opportunity for professional recognition" receives the lowest combined percent of responses, although 77 percent of faculty members consider it "important" or "very important." The other two factors that less than 90 percent of faculty members rate as "very important" or "important" are "reputation of department" (88 percent) and "physical working conditions" (86 percent).

Satisfaction

Among the same 17 factors they rated for importance, faculty members are currently most satisfied with their "opportunities to educate students" and "teaching courses in which they are interested." A "flexible work schedule," the "opportunity to work independently," and "job security" are three other highly ranked factors in terms of satisfaction.

One of the lowest levels of satisfaction reported across any sub-population is by female faculty members with regard to their perceived opportunities for professional recognition, with only 9 percent saying that they are "very satisfied."

Merging the "very satisfied" and "satisfied" responses, the picture that emerges is one of faculty members being overwhelmingly content with both the professional and personal benefits to holding an academic appointment. To the extent they are not satisfied, the discontent centers around the level of institutional support, either for scholarly inquiry, the teaching load, or compensation. Student quality is another issue that a sizable number of faculty members are not satisfied with currently.

Personal Factors

A set of four of the 17 factors — attractive salary and benefits, job security, a flexible work schedule, and time for family and personal needs — contrasts how faculty members think about their personal lives in relation to other professional and intellectual interests. While more than 50 percent of respondents list all four of these items as "very important," there is considerable variation across the four generally, and especially when examined across the various socioeconomic and institutional groupings.

An attractive salary and benefits package, noted as "very important" by 52 percent of faculty members overall, is more important for women and racial/ethnic minorities, 58 percent and 71 percent, respectively, than for men and whites. Compensation is relatively more important for those in two-year institutions (65 percent). Only 13 percent of faculty members are "very satisfied" with the direct economic side of their current position.

Job security is "very important" for 58 percent of faculty members. Those teaching in two-year institutions report the highest "very important" percentage (71 percent), compared with 55 percent for those in four-year colleges and universities. Forty-five percent of faculty members are "very satisfied" with job security, one of the higher satisfaction levels of all 17 factors. White faculty members (47 percent very satisfied) are more satisfied with their current level of job security than are non-whites (31 percent).

A flexible work schedule is "very important" for 60 percent of faculty surveyed. However this benefit is more important for females (68 percent) than for males (55 percent), and for non-white faculty members (67 percent) than for whites (59 percent). The overall level of satisfaction with having a flexible schedule — 47 percent report being "very satisfied" — is the third highest across the 17 factors, and generally at the same level across the various institutional and socioeconomic categories.

Time for family and personal needs, the fourth of these personal variables, is rated "very important" by 76 percent of faculty members. More non-white faculty members (84 percent) and those in the

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health/medical professions (87 percent) rate it as "very important" than other groups. Although the importance placed on personal and family time is relatively high, the corresponding "very satisfied" is low (30 percent). More women (78 percent) rate "time for family" as "very important" but fewer of them (24 percent) rate it "very satisfied" when compared to men (76 percent and 33 percent, respectively).

FACTORS THAT IMPINGE UPON ACADEMIC WORK

Poll participants were given the opportunity to reflect upon nine personal and professional considerations that could have interfered with their academic work and/or caused them stress within the last year. The nine factors include both personal issues (family responsibilities, physical or health problems, and personal finances) and work-related topics, such as the work load, students, financial support at the institution, and interpersonal strains inside and beyond the faculty member's home department. The survey format called for only "yes" or "no" response options.

Of the nine factors, those which relate directly to teaching responsibilities — student preparation and commitment (50 percent) and the current work load (47 percent) — are the only ones that about half of faculty members agree affected their work life within the last year (see Table 5). Health-related problems (15 percent) and personal finances (13 percent) appear to have produced the least amount of interference for these faculty members.

For eight of the nine factors, a higher percentage of women report interference than do men, with the work load and health factors being at least 10 percentage points higher for female faculty members.

These same two factors — work load and student preparation/commitment — appear at the top of lists by tenure status and by institutional type as well, with the latter factor having the largest "yes" percentage of any factor (61 percent) for faculty members in two-year institutions. For faculty members at public four-year colleges and universities, however, the lack of institutional support for scholarly activity garners the second highest percentage, moving workload to third place. The lack of adequate institutional support also affects more women, non-white faculty members, and those affiliated with four-year public institutions than their counterparts.

Table 5

Distribution of Factors that Interfered with Academic Work

	Total
Student preparation and commitment	50%
Work load	47
Lack of institutional support	41
Intradepartmental strains	35
Interdepartmental strains	31
Family responsibilities	31
Inability to obtain research grants	30
Physical or health problems	15
Personal finances	13

SOURCE: *1999 American Faculty Poll*, NORC and TIAA-CREFF

THE PRESENT STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The final section examines the response to the final survey question that asked respondent faculty members to comment on concerns they might have about the future of higher education in the United States. Overall, more than 99 percent of all survey respondents commented.

These qualitative comments (as opposed to the more quantitative responses to most of the other American Faculty Poll questions) fall into a few selected, well-defined categories and views. Unweighted totals appear in parentheses; individual poll participants could have given multiple responses.

- The issue that garners the most comment (n=412) is the lack of preparation on the part of students entering college today. Current students are simply less serious about their work and less motivated, (n=173). In addition, a few faculty members fault students for being too career- or job-oriented and "being in college to get a job not an education" (n=30).

- Faculty members appear quite concerned about the financial realities facing higher education today, especially

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with respect to the level of, and rates of increase in, tuition, as well as the escalating costs of attending college (n=249) (see Table 6).

■ Finding and retaining good qualified faculty members in the future is a concern expressed by some (n=121). They cite the level of remuneration, the increased work load, lack of respect for the profession and assaults on tenure as principal factors leading to the increased use of part-time and adjunct faculty.

■ A number of faculty members express the opinion that a major concern facing higher education today is the lack of respect and public support, financial and otherwise, and the low priority assigned to higher education by government officials at all levels, by taxpayers, and by the general public (n=119).

■ Some complain about the "commodification" of higher education, with one by-product being an all-out assault on the humanities and liberal arts, and another by-product being training that is too narrow and too vocational (n=72).

■ Although some note a concern about the need to keep abreast of and to incorporate the latest technologies into their teaching, as well as preparing students for the world in which they will enter, other faculty members express strong anti-technology sentiments (n=55).

Table 6

Distribution of Options Concerning Tuition and Fees

	Tuition and Fees in General			Tuition and Fees at Own Institution		
	Too High	About Right	Too Low	Too High	About Right	Too Low
Total	52.8%	39.8%	3.3%	23.9%	59.3%	15.4%

SOURCE: *1999 American Faculty Poll*, NORC and TIAA-CREFF

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